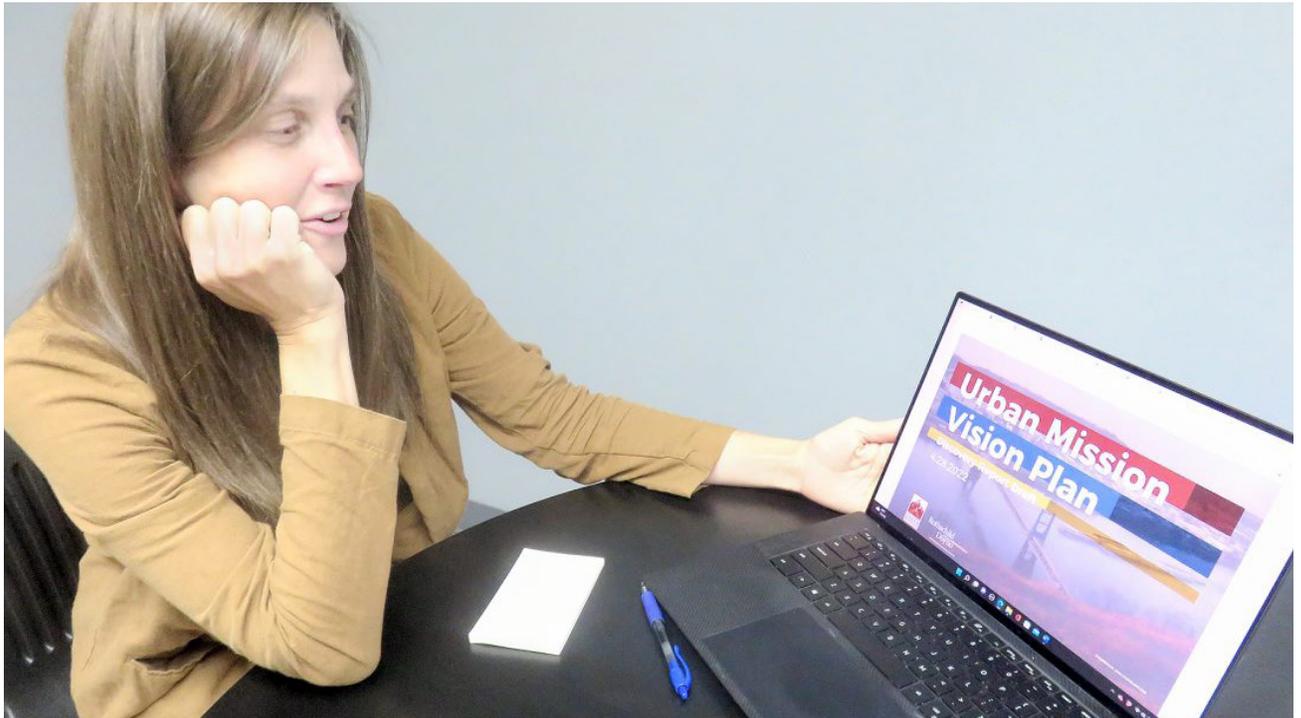


The Weirton Daily Times

June 13, 2022

Urban Mission Ministries planning a community meeting

By Janice Kiaski



HOPING FOR GOOD TURNOUT — The Rev. Ashley Steele, executive director of Urban Mission Ministries, looks at a vision plan being created with the help of Rothschild Doyno Collaborative of Pittsburgh, an architecture and urban design firm. The public is invited to a community meeting Tuesday, beginning at 5 p.m. at the Seventh Street Plaza, to hear updates and offer feedback on how the mission can best serve the community with the ministry sites it has. -- Janice Kiaski

Updates on the Seventh Street Plaza and a dream about development of a ministry corridor in downtown Steubenville are topics Urban Mission Ministries is hoping the public will want to weigh in on during a community meeting Tuesday.

An opportunity to “listen, share and dream about the future” is part of the free gathering that will run from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the

Seventh Street Plaza and include food, according to the Rev. Ashley Steele, the mission’s executive director.

Anyone is welcome to attend the meeting hosted by the mission and led by representatives of Rothschild Doyno Collaborative of Pittsburgh, an architecture and urban design firm.

The mission has been working with the firm since the beginning

of the year. Steele explained why.

“We wanted to look at all our ministry sites because the plaza has inspired us to look at all of our ministry sites to make sure we’re using them to the best that we can, that we are making sure that what we do in each building is actually addressing a need in the community,” Steele began. “And it’s just to create more of a consistent feel, even a look

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for each of our buildings so that when you drive by, you'd say, 'Oh, that looks like an Urban Mission Ministries site, because we're a little bit scattered.'

"From a practical standpoint, working with someone who has that area of expertise is good for us anyways because we need to make sure that we present ourselves in a good way in the community, so people know where they're going if they need to access a service," she continued.

"But the other part of it is that, because they are urban designers, they are helping us think through how do we make the most out of each ministry space that we have, how do we create a consistency with our buildings but also how do we connect them in a way that makes sense, so they've been focusing not only on the plaza — even though that's our anchor — but our warehouse complements that and our War Memorial building complements that and even the green space complements everything that's going to be taking place in this immediate area," she said, referring to the garden area across the street from the warehouse.

"They have done a lot of work with organizations like ours from homeless shelters to food pantries to thrift stores, so they understand what we do, and they're going



Rev. Ashley Steele presents RDCollab's sketchbook page to illustrate the Mission, Vision, and Purpose of Urban Mission.

to try to help us figure out how to do it better with what we have and using them efficiently," Steele said.

"We want to be good stewards of what we've been given, and even though we have a pretty good idea about our shelters and what function they'll be using and already are, with some of our other spaces, there is room for creativity and growth, so that's what they're helping us discern. They're helping us figure that out," she added.

"Their unique approach that we liked that they used with other shelters and food pantries and thrift stores before in the Pittsburgh area is to get as much feedback as they can from the community. In order for them to have a really good idea about who

we are, they also need to know what the community thinks and how the community sees us," she said.

While they've generated some feedback, more is welcomed, and a good turnout Tuesday would be helpful toward that effect.

"It would be beneficial for them and, for us, exciting to see our people who have some type of vested interest in the mission, whether they're donors or volunteers or folks who utilize our services or our neighbors," Steele explained.

The work to date has included surveys, on-site walks, interviews and meetings with, for instance, Steubenville City Council members and Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce leadership.

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“They are doing an asset-based approach so they build on the good, so things that are already working here in the community they’re building on that, which we like that,” Steele said, adding, “They’re telling us about ourselves.”

It’s about what’s going well but opportunities for improvement in all of the ministry sites, according to Steele.

“We have learned that in many areas we are meeting the needs of the community,” she said,

“What we’re still seeking out is what else or how else could we best serve the community, especially through the plaza, especially through this space, and we want to just make sure anything that we had ever put out

there in terms of testing what we want to do in these spaces, still aligns with the needs and wants of the community,” Steele continued.

The firm’s role also is to help the mission look at new opportunities.

“That’s yet to be determined, but I think even during this community meeting they’re going to share a few opportunities that they see, and they want to test it out with those who are present to let them add their feedback,” Steele said.

Another community meeting will be held this summer and from it all, recommendations ultimately will surface.

“It will definitely form the things we do in the next year, the next five years, the next 10 years,” she said. “We know from a priority standpoint, the plaza has to be

our first priority in terms of starting the renovation there, and finishing that in a timely manner according to grants that we have and other obligations.”

Steele is excited about the meeting’s potential and hopes for a good turnout.

“I really think it will be an inspiring evening because we get to hear from others what their perspective is and so far, their perspective has been really good.

“For us it’s fun to see as the Urban Mission because this is something we have been planning and praying and preparing for, and now it’s becoming more real each day.”

(Kiaski can be contacted at jkiaski@heraldstaronline.com.)